CEPHALOTUS HUNTING IN THE DEEP S.W. OF AUSTRALIA

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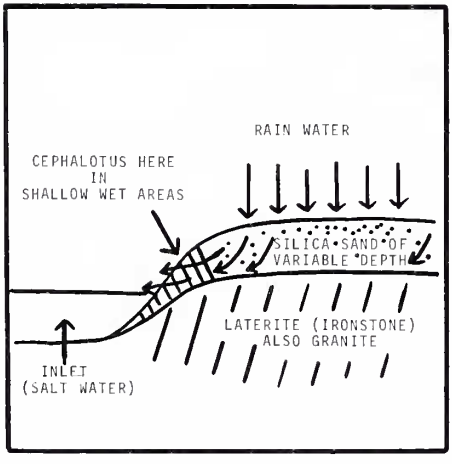
Cephalotus grows only in the lower coastal areas of the South West of Western Australia, from East Albany to Augusta. The area extends inland in relation with the sand plain and is most usually associated with this soil type. I have yet to find this plant growing in loam or clay soils. The swamp flats abound to the coast, broken only by sand dunes and rocky hills at the ocean. In this area water flows and seeps from the Karri forests through rivers, creeks and swamps finishing at inlets to the ocean.

Cephalotus grows mainly in sloping ground where water seeps over layers of mixed sedimentary deposits (consisting of black peat from a few moss species and leaf mould and sand) on laterite zones. This is typical of the coastal plain.



On our trip to the lower South West, Robert Oliver, a fellow CP freak, and myself took a few days off from our Albany hang-gliding/fishing trip to seek out CP in these inlet areas.

The inlet we scouted out was Nornalup National Park (WALPOLE). We followed a swamp right to the inlet's edge, where the inlet's water had eroded back into the swamp land, and had left almost vertical sandcliffs up to 25m high. We clambered down the cliffs to the inlet's shore which was only about 3m wide in places. Parts of the cliff were right in the water. As we stood in the water and looked up at the cliff face, we could see water seeping out of the cliff. The cliff face was only held together here and there with reeds and low vegetation. In amongst the little tufts of reeds *Cephalotus* was in abundance.

Cephalotus follicularis
photo by Robert Folkerts

Cephalotus was growing in full sun right to the top of the cliff face. The plants were up to 20 cm across in clumps and some of the pitchers were 7 cm long, their colour was a deep purple/maroon. These *Cephalotus* clumps were nearly all pitchers with very few leaves. We stood

Two People Bay
Photo by Steve Rose

Cephalotus follicularis
Photo by Steve Rose

Cephalotus: Two People Bay
Photo by Steve Rose

near the water's edge; at chest height in amongst clumps of reeds, *Cephalotus* grew. These shade-growing plants are predominantly green. These thriving plants at the bottom of the cliff face are continually sprayed with salt water, with no apparent effects.

As we continued along the base of the cliffs we could see evidence of the erosion that had taken place on the sand cliff face. The waves have undermined the cliff during storms, where huge clumps of upper cliff (up to 4m across still complete with reeds and *Cephalotus*). The next storm could wash these clumps into the inlet. The erosion, it seems, has been going on since Adam was a boy. No doubt, as one lot of *Cephalotus* is cleared from the cliff face, this bare patch is quickly colonised by *Cephalotus* again. *Cephalotus* seeds washed down through the swamp above the cliff face would soon take their place.

We also found small caves situations that had been created by erosion of the lower cliff face, but before the upper parts of the cliff had fallen. The caves are big enough to stand in and go back into the cliff face about 1½m. *Cephalotus* is growing around the mouth of these caves along with *D. pulchella.* With closer observation we found *D. pulchella* growing up the inside of these sand caves and, strangely enough, growing on the ceilings of the caves in abundance.

About 2km across the other side of this inlet we camped for the night. Here there was a small swamp on a slope about 30° and 3 hectares in size. The swamp had been huge until the locals decided to build a golf course there. The ground in the swamp is mainly knee-deep peat and mud complete with seeping water. The only reason there is still a swamp here was quite evident. When the bulldozer was clearing the land for the golf course, the swampy ground bogged the bulldozer, to the disappointment of the locals.

Along the top of the swamp next to the golf course, *Cephalotus* is everywhere growing in full sun. *D. pulchella* is in abundance, 5cm across with green flat leaves and vivid orange/red traps topped with bright pink flowers. Right in the mushy black peat we found the rare *D. hamiltonii* growing in three's and four's and clumped together. The leaves are deep purple and the plants were 6cm across, all growing in full sunlight, some with old flower spikes 45cm high. *D. hamiltonii,* I believe, is just about as hard to find in W.A. as *D. prolifera* is to find in Queensland.

Robert Oliver and myself decided to venture into this swamp, where the thick scrub was about 1m over our heads. Pushing our way through the scrub with Robert leading, I was packing death with Robert giving me a running commentary up front: "Small tiger snake on right, Allen, another to the left." (This is the year of the snake in W.A.; we have had about 45 snake bite victims so far this year — unfortunately, one death. The unusually long dry spell this year has extended the snake season.)

Amongst the scrub and snakes we found *Cephalotus.* The plants were very green, lots of leaves and very few pitchers. I must conclude that more light influences the production of more pitchers with less leaves, a more robust and better-coloured plant.

Our exploration of Nornalup Inlet was a most rewarding experience, especially finding *D. hamiltonii.* We will visit the area again when the bulbous droseras appear in the next few months. The South West of Western Australia is a gold mine for CP. Two years ago our good friend Steve Rose found several new *Drosera* species during the major flowering period September-November. With this state of affairs in mind the possibility of finding new species with more exploration seems a reasonable assumption.

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